

Esther's Town

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extent of technocratic thought and planning underway in the 1920s. Historians have only recently come to recognize the importance of this era for the elaboration of planning and managerial institutions. The BAE was one such institution. Through its research activities, and particularly through its "Outlook" program, the bureau sought to unite the planning capacities of social scientists with the business needs of farmers. And Olsen's diary shows that he and his agricultural economists endured frustrations similar to those experienced by social scientists in other fields attempting to "manage" unemployment and the business cycle during the 1920s. In virtually every instance, insufficient and unreliable data hamstrung the planning abilities of technocratic social scientists. Although the Outlook program suffered from other complications, Olsen's diary illuminates another instance of what is now emerging as a dominant theme in the historiography of the New Era—the frustrating gap between planning vision and planning competence.

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Esther's Town, by Deemer Lee. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980. pp. viii, 267. Photographs, appendix, notes, index. \$12.95.

Nobody was better qualified to write the history of Estherville, Iowa than the late Deemer Lee. He was a native son of Esther's Town, a trained observer, and, for forty-one years, editor and publisher of his town's newspaper.

The residents of Estherville and Emmet County are infinitely richer for Deemer Lee's willingness to spend hundreds of hours pouring over newspaper files, jogging his own memory, talking with old-timers, and laboriously pounding his typewriter. His manuscript was accepted for publication within a week following his death in 1979; the book is a fitting legacy.

Its strength as a detailed and thorough local history is, however, the book's greatest weakness as well. It is so parochial and personal, so caught up in the minutiae of Estherville that it has limited attraction for persons without an Emmet County or Lee family connection.

The author relied heavily on secondary sources, including some of dubious value, while ignoring reliable published accounts including some in the *Annals of Iowa* and the venerable *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*. This author's unique qualifications may entitle him to the

privilege. His style is that of a nineteenth-century editorialist. His fulsome prose, however, does not seem inappropriate for this reminiscent labor of love.

The work is not particularly well organized. It lacks chronology and, thus, makes it difficult for a stranger to Estherville to avoid getting lost. Chapters are unnumbered and their titles do not necessarily describe their contents. The book constitutes a recitation of facts and anecdotes unaccompanied by any profound synthesis of experiences, philosophies, or trends.

It was apparently not Deemer Lee's aim to summarize his great wealth of experience and information in a succinct and sweeping epilogue. Even so, his conclusion includes these well-ordered words: "When I'm asked by a stranger to spell [Estherville], I sometimes hear a snicker. . . . 'Yes, Estherville!' I repeat. Why not? 'Estherville'—the only one in the world. After all, if Robert Ridley had married someone other than Esther, this could have been Phoebeville, Lenaville, Kittyville, or Daisyville. Esther is a pretty name for a pretty ville, nestled along a meandering river under bluffs wooded by native oak, walnut, maples, and other dense timber."

Esthervilleans are fortunate indeed that Deemer Lee was among them, watching and writing.

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The Life of an Ordinary Woman, by Anne Ellis. (Foreword by Elliott West, introduction by Lucy Fitch Perkins.) Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980. pp. 301. Illustrations. \$6.25.

In his foreword to *Life of an Ordinary Woman*, Elliott West states that writings by women living in mining camps are rare. This reviewer would argue that there are many more extant diaries, memoirs, and reminiscences by mining camp women than most scholars realize, but would agree that Ellis' story is one of the most gripping, touching, and compelling among them.

Writing in the late 1920s, Anne Ellis looked back over a long and full life to recount her mother's girlhood recollections and later years in mining camps, her own childhood, her infatuation with a man she was destined never to marry, the death of two husbands and a daughter, and her struggle to survive as a poverty-stricken widow with two children. In 1918 her grit attracted the attention of a local Republican

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